

¹LORNA ROSS MCKEE

Tape 176

Oral History of Lorna Ross McKee, March 26, 1987

Interviewed by Holli McKee, a granddaughter and 6th grader at LaPoint Elementary

Transcribed by Janet Taylor, June 2001

Interviewer: Holli

Holli: I'm doing an oral history with Lorna McKee. She's sixty-one years old. We are going to be talking about what it was like when she went to school. Today is March 26, 1987. Describe the school you went to.

Lorna McKee (Lorna): The school I went to, Holli was a brick building that had four rooms in it. It was built the year that I was born, back in 1924. I'd like to tell you a little bit about this building. This was the second little schoolhouse that they had in Tridell, and so I'll tell you a little bit about this schoolhouse.

The Uintah School District held a bond election in the spring of 1924 to get money to build new schoolhouses and to build on to others. If the bond passed, Tridell was to get a new building. This was the Tridell School that was opened on June 9, 1924. Campbells, Ashtons, and Showalters, made a bid of \$12,343 which was accepted. About two acres of ground had been purchased from Horace and Alice Morrill, for a consideration of \$250, on which to build this building. On February 13, 1931, three more acres were purchased for \$339 from the same persons, to make the school grounds larger.

So the building began in July, with Elisha Campbell supervising the building. Leo Christensen and George A. Schwartz and other men of the community helped prepare the ground and get the cement foundation run. Brick for the building was taken from Swain's kiln in LaPoint. Davis Morrill hauled the gyp to plaster the walls from Vernal, in an iron-tired wagon pulled by four horses. This building contained four rooms, approximately twenty-four by twenty-five feet, with eight-foot walls running north and south, and east and west, between the rooms. The outside doors were in the west and east halls. Each room had a small closet in one corner for supplies needed in the classrooms.

A small storage and library was built in the end of the north hall and later a kitchen was put in the south hall. There was no indoor plumbing, and so little privies were built some distance from the schoolhouse. Each room in this schoolhouse was heated by a large, pot-bellied coal heater with a metal shield around it. The fires were built early in the morning by the custodian and the teachers kept the fires going during the day by putting in buckets full of coal. They would have the older boys in the room go out and fill up the coal buckets for the teachers. About two years before the school was closed, a furnace was installed in the basement on the east side of the schoolhouse. The cement work for this basement was done by Clyde Merkley.

This building was completed by the end of December, 1924, and during the Christmas holidays they had a big dance, an event that everybody came to. Two rooms were heated and

lighted for this celebration. Of course there wasn't any electricity to begin with, so I guess lamps were brought. Refreshments were served, and dancing was enjoyed, with music furnished by Grant Morrill, Alma Meacham,?, and Ruth McKee. Ruth McKee would have been your great-grandmother. About three hundred persons attended this celebration.

School began in this new building in January 1925, with Leroy Morrill as principal, with Clarence Hair and Nellie Gillman and Margaret Bartlett as teachers. The children from the Whiterocks Bench also attended this school that year. During that winter William B. Searle drove a school wagon from the north end of Whiterocks Bench and Ivan Ross drove one from the south end to bring the children to school. In September of 1926 these children were transferred to the Whiterocks School.

We had a lot of different teachers that used to teach in our school building. My teachers, as I remember them, were Margaret Bartlett, she taught first, second, and third grades, and then there was Alice Morrill was my next teacher, I went to her for fourth and fifth. She died just at the end of the fourth grade year and her son took over her job as a teacher. She was a very good teacher. Then Mabel Hobbs taught for a while; Spencer Squire was my fifth and sixth teacher. I don't know whether he's a relative to your teacher, Mrs. Squires, or not. Then I had Thelma Lee and then, again, I had Spencer Squire during the seventh and eighth grades.

It was a nice school building, we thought. It got real muddy during the winter months when there was a lot of mud. We didn't have paved roads or anything so kids aren't too careful to clean their feet, so they'd clog in with lots of mud on their feet and so the floors during the winter months were quite muddy and dirty. Even though they would be swept it was still quite dusty and muddy with many kids coming in with dirty feet.

We didn't have running water, so what do you think we had to use for drinking water? We had a ditch that ran in front of the schoolhouse and the kids would go out and break the ice in the ditch and bring in a bucket of water and we just had a cup or two there that we all used, the same cup, and drank water out of the bucket. That was the way our school was.

Holli: During recesses what games did you play?

Lorna: We had a lot of fun during our recesses. We'd play jacks in the wintertime, that's what most of us played. We'd play jacks, and sometimes, when I'd gotten up into the seventh and eighth grades, we had gotten old enough that we liked to dance, so we'd push the benches off to one side of the schoolroom and we'd have a dance. One of the teachers knew how to play the piano, so we'd dance and do the Virginia Reel and different things. We had a lot of fun. And then we also played baseball, softball, and volleyball a lot during the spring and summer months. Not summer months, but in the spring months and in the fall months. Then we used to play marbles a lot. The boys—that was their favorite thing, was to play marbles. They had a game called "Perk." Do you know how to play "Perk?" That was a marble game that they'd play on the south side of the schoolhouse. They'd dig three rows, oh, probably seven or eight feet from each hole, and they'd try to see who could... It was a game of who could go through these three holes, and there was this other hole way over on the other end, it was the fourth hole. After you'd gotten into the fourth hole, then you were "dead" and you could come back and kill these other people. You'd shoot their marbles and then they were out of the game. So we used to play "Perk," and we had a game called "Bear Bait" that we played on the south side. It was kind of a tag game. During the noon hour, I went home for lunch so I wasn't always at school

during the lunch hour, but during recesses, I was always there, but I went home for my dinner because we lived close enough to the schoolhouse that I could go home and eat dinner.

Holli: Describe your favorite game that you played.

Lorna: Well, like I said, probably my favorite game during the winter was playing jacks. And during the spring or fall I liked to play hopscotch. Oh, I loved to play hopscotch and jump-the-rope. I guess those were my favorite games. And then as I got older I liked softball and volleyball.

Holli: How were you disciplined?

Lorna: Well, usually if we didn't do what we should and were disciplined, we had to stay in for recess or for noon or after school. I don't remember being disciplined very much. The boys seemed to always be the ones to get in problems, and so, I've seen the principal bring a few boys into class holding their ears and bringing them in, or by the hair of their head, bringing them in. There weren't many. They didn't use harsh discipline or anything, but usually they'd just keep you in and make you write "I will be good" or something like that about a hundred times or something like that. Or just stay in at recess and do homework or whatever you had to do. I suppose they still do that, don't they, if you're not good? They have you stay in your class?

Holli: Did they have to stand in the corner sometimes?

Lorna: Yes, I remember a few boys standing in the corner. I never did stand in the corner, but I know there were a few boys that did stand in the corners. But generally they would just keep them in after school or during recesses.

Holli: Tell about the homework you had.

Lorna: I believe you children have more homework than we did. Usually at this time the children had a lot of chores to do at home. There was always chips, and wood, and coal that had to be got in, and the boys always had calves to feed and cows to milk and different things that they'd help their fathers with, so the teachers would usually have us do what work we needed to do right at school. I don't remember taking very much homework home during my elementary school years. Probably some, but not a lot. When we did go home to do it we didn't have electric lights to do our homework by. We just had a lamp, with kerosene in it, which didn't give a very bright light, so you didn't really want to do too much homework after night, because you couldn't see that well. We didn't really have that much homework to do. The teacher, when she taught two to three grades, that's when we would be doing our work, was when she was working with one of the other grades. Sometimes it was hard not to listen to what she was telling one of the other grades, to keep our minds on our own work and not listen to her teaching the other grades what they needed to do. So, sometimes it was a little bit hard that way.

Holli: Did you do your homework right after you got home, or did you do your chores and other things first?

Lorna: I would usually do my chores and I always had dishes to do at night, and I had to get in the chips and the bark and firewood or coal, or whatever we needed to keep the fire going at night. So, I would usually do mine at night. Then of course when we got older we got electricity,

so that made it easier. But I usually played around a bit, too, after I got home from school. I didn't like to get right into the homework. I was tired of school by the time I got home, and I wasn't ready to start doing homework.

Holli: Describe the clothes you had to wear to school.

Lorna: Our clothes were something else. We never wore slacks or jeans, or whatever, as a girl, we never – that was unheard-of, for a girl to wear pants like the boys did. So we always wore dresses and in the wintertime we always had long-armed and long-legged underwear to wear, with a slit in the back and a drop-seat. That wasn't too pleasant either, and we had these long cotton underwear. Oh, all the girls just hated them. Then we had to wear long, brown cotton socks over these long-legged underwear. And it always made wrinkly legs on your legs, and then you'd have your dress, you know, and your feet and your legs always looked ugly to me, because you didn't have very good shoes, and then these old, wrinkly brown socks hanging below this dress. And how we kept our socks up: we had what we called a panty-waist. It was kind of a harness that they'd put at the top of you. It was a strap here and then they'd have garters that were about nine or ten inches long, that fastened onto this panty-waist and then you hooked it onto these long socks. So, anyway, we didn't look too pretty, I don't think, when we went to school, but we always wore dresses. But we'd wear the same dress, maybe all week. Maybe we'd change once during the week and put on a different dress, but when we got home from school we'd always have to go change that dress so it wouldn't get dirty and we could wear it the next day. We didn't have very many dresses.

Holli: What time did you go to school?

Lorna: Our school was from nine o'clock until, I think, three-thirty, as I remember it. But I lived close enough to the school that... Our principal had a little hand-bell, and he'd ring it, and as soon as he'd start ringing that bell I'd make a mad dash from my home, which was up, underneath the hill, to the schoolhouse, and I could be there within about four or five minutes, and it took the boys that were up in the top of the school grounds playing, it would take them five minutes to get in anyway, so usually by the time all the kids straggled in from the school ground I could still be home and get to school in the time it took the kids that were at the school. We had fifteen-minute recesses. How long are your recesses?

Holli: Fifteen minutes.

Lorna: I think that's what we did. I think we had a fifteen-minute recess in the morning and fifteen-minute recess in the afternoon and then an hour lunch. Of course, when I first went to school, we didn't have buses, right to begin with at least, as far as I can remember. Most of the kids walked that lived a long ways away, or rode a horse. I know your Grandpa McKee always rode a horse. They had a place in front of the schoolhouse where they would tie their horses. When the boys would come, they would tie their horses up. The girls—it was a long walk for some girls, for little girls—to walk to school sometimes. Then later they got buses so it made it better. But most of the time I went to school there they didn't have buses.

Holli: Did any girls ride horses?

Lorna: I'm sure some of the girls rode horses, but since I lived close enough that I could walk or run to school, I never did, of course, ride a horse. But I remember some of the girls riding

horses, and like I said they didn't wear slacks or Levis or pants. They just wore their dresses, and that's why it was so necessary in the winter time for them to have long stockings on, because it would have frozen their legs. In fact, some of their legs were about frozen anyway by the time they could get to school.

Holli: Did you take a lunch or go home for lunch?

Lorna: To begin with, I usually went home to eat lunch. We usually didn't have that much to eat when I got home, probably a piece of bread and butter and a drink of milk. But later on, they started a hot lunch program. To begin with, one of the mothers in the ward, they took turns making up big batches of soup, and they'd bring it in a milk can to school, and they'd give everybody a dish of soup, and then the students would bring a piece of bread and butter from home to eat with the hot soup. That's how it started.

Then later on they made a lunchroom out of one of the little rooms there in the schoolhouse. Then they got so they'd have a little bit more to go with it. Maybe they'd have a cup of milk to go with your soup, or maybe they'd even have two items. But to begin with that's all they had, was maybe a dish of macaroni or soup or a dish of hot beans, or something like that. But I didn't usually take a lunch. But the kids that lived a long ways away, some of them would bring bread and butter, but we didn't have much money. There wasn't anybody that had very much money during those days, it would have been in the 1930s. It was during the Depression and there just wasn't that much money available for people to spend much on anything that they didn't have to absolutely have to have. So that's how we had our lunches.

Holli: How do you feel about school now?

Lorna: I think they have some great school programs now. Personally, as far as my education went, I thought that I got a good education at the school I went to. I learned how to read real well. We had phonics. I was a good reader. I could sound out words when I was real young. I enjoyed spelling. Especially, I enjoyed reading books. Later, when I was in about the seventh or eighth grade, they had what they called a "library box." There would probably be, oh, about a hundred books in this box. It had wheels on it. When we'd get our work done, they'd wheel this... We had certain hours that we could use this library box. It would have books for all ages, for school kids. We could go through there and sort out which book we wanted to read. Then maybe a half hour later they'd wheel it into the next room and they'd read library books for a while.

But that's what our library was: a library box about four feet long by two or three feet wide and it had wheels on it and they'd wheel it from room to room, and that was our library. But I still felt like we got a good education. We studied hard, we had good teachers, really good teachers. They were dedicated teachers. I've felt that they had an interest in each one of us. A lot of times they would read stories to us, you know, they'd get a certain book. I remember – what was the name of that book? It was a Tarzan book. I remember this one Tarzan book the teacher read, and we got so caught up in that, we just couldn't wait. They'd usually read a chapter as we'd come in from recess, and we all got so caught up in this Tarzan book that we could hardly wait for noon hour to be over so we could hear another chapter about Tarzan.

So, I felt like we got a good start in school, and of course, as I got older we went into high school. We just had elementary and high school. We didn't have a junior high. So I went to the first eight grades at Tridell School and then the next four years I went to Alterra High School and then I went on to college at BYU. But I felt that I had good learning experiences in the school. I'm sure they're not equal to what you kids have in school now, because you have so many opportunities. You have computers. You have so many visual aids and everything to work with that helps you. So I feel that you have good schools. I'm impressed with the Lapoint School and the education that our children are getting.

As I went through school, I felt that for my education and my children's education that they were lacking in English. If there was one thing that I felt like that they had let down in, in our high schools. I think this is true not only out here, but at Union, that our children just didn't have enough English classes. Or else, my children didn't apply themselves or something, because they felt that when they got into college that they were lacking good English classes. For that part, I think that it could have been improved there. But I think as a whole we have good, dedicated teachers. They are concerned about students. I felt this when I went to school.

We had a lot of happy times at school. When you have three grades in one room, you feel like all of those in that room are your friends. At Valentines we didn't buy Valentines, we just made homemade Valentines and sent to everybody in the room. And everybody seemed like they were your friend. Not just the ones that you happened to be close to, but everybody in the school was your friend. So, I think we had a lot of good, concerned teachers, and I could have probably done better in school if I'd have done more homework, but they didn't really assign that much homework when I was a child. I always had a period of about three weeks when I was going to school, that I had what was called "quinsy." Do you know what quinsy is?

Holli: No.

Lorna: Quinsy is an infection of the throat that would cause my tonsils to swell up to the point that I couldn't even put a finger in between my teeth, my tonsils were so swollen. And they would swell up to the point that they would break, where they would fill up with pus, and then I'd have a high, high fever.

END OF SIDE ONE.

SIDE TWO:

Lorna: That happened every year up until I got in high school. I would miss days of school, during the winter, with "quinsy." My grandmother had it. I don't hear of it much any more, because they have antibiotics and so on. Then of course, we always had chickenpox and mumps and scarlet fever and all the childhood diseases that go around, so a lot of times a lot of kids would miss lots of school. Do you have anything else you'd like me to talk about?

Holli: I guess not.

Lorna: I appreciate being able to make this tape up for you, Holly. I hadn't thought about my school days for quite a while. It's fun to reflect and to think about school days and how they have changed. You have such beautiful buildings to meet in, and nice buses to ride, and a good dinner at school, and you should be grateful for all the things that you have in your school, especially for your dedicated teachers. Thank you.